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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of elementary and secondary teacher education students' experiments in making multicultural calendar artifacts and their explorations and interpretations of artifacts as calendars. Researchers examined multicultural calendar artifacts as objects that documented approaches to multicultural curriculum and investigated how students constructed meaning and interpreted multicultural curriculum questions. Participants were career-change students in a Global Perspectives course designed to promote self-reflection (e.g., examining taken-for-granted presuppositions and stereotypical biases). Students had to create and present multicultural calendars intended for actual future use in teaching. The calendars were designed for constructing multicultural meanings intrapersonally and interpersonally. Students had to present their calendars during class and receive feedback. Study data included original calendar artifacts and their accompanying materials, videotapes of students' class presentations, instructors' and students' interactive observations and feedback, audiotaped discussions between instructors as they interpreted the calendars, student writings, and course evaluations. Results indicated that the multicultural calendars showed how graduate career-change student teachers envisioned their future work in curriculum making, teaching, and holistic evaluations. Creating multicultural calendars enabled students to get in touch with their ideas and beliefs about approaching diverse students and curriculum and become confident in contributing to a school community. The calendars made possible an exchange of views between colleagues interested in developing students' global perspectives. (Contains 51 references.) (SM)

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A Collaborative Action Research Investigation in Teacher Education: The Global Perspectives Calendar as a methodology for enhancing multicultural teaching

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A Collaborative Action Research Investigation in Teacher Education: The Global Perspectives Calendar as a methodology for enhancing multicultural teaching

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper is in draft form for reading and response in a roundtable format by participants at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal, April 22, 1999. As teacher educators from Pace University's New York City Campus, our collaborative action research study is about artifacts created by a culturally diverse group of graduate career change students in a preservice teacher education course called Global Perspectives. Our intention as teacher/researchers is to investigate how our students construct meaning and interpret multicultural curriculum questions.

The purpose of this paper is to describe our methods of studying our elementary and secondary teacher education students' experiments in the making of multicultural calendar artifacts, and their explorations and interpretations of artifacts as calendars. These multicultural calendar artifacts are studied as objects that document approaches to multicultural curriculum. The phenomena we study in our action research are the processes involved in students' creation and assessment of the multicultural calendar artifacts presented in the course.

Teacher educators can benefit from this study because they may identify and resonate with the developing interpretations of the themes expressed in the students' works. Additionally, they may take a practical and critical stance toward the processes of our collaboration which have emergent themes that will be elucidated as the study progresses. We seek the roundtable participants' insights into the themes generated by our study.

CONTEXT:

The Global Perspectives course syllabus was originally created as part of the design of a new teacher certification program for "career changers." In order to prepare preservice education students to teach in urban and other diverse elementary and secondary classrooms, Global Perspectives offers opportunities to examine stereotypes, presuppositions and biases, and to integrate world concerns into curriculum planning. For eight years, teaching the course was the reflexive praxis of one teacher educator. Through an administrative agreement to bring in another faculty member, the cultivation of multicultural curriculum knowledge within and among students became a common purpose of the authors in the context of teaching the same course during different semesters. As teacher educators, we model methods and encourage our students to imagine themselves teaching with a global perspective. Our decision to cooperatively develop and modify the course requirements led to a mutual awareness of the purposefulness of a collaboration in action research. Through our collaboration emerged a process of shaping a multilayered methodological approach to understanding students' meanings of multicultural curriculum.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Within the foundational course, Global Perspectives, are texts and activities in which students become knowledgeable about anti-racist, culturally responsive, and social justice curricula (Ayers & Ford, 1996; Banks, 1991; Banks & Banks, 1996; Clegg et al, 1995; Collum, 1996; Galbraith, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Issues of culture, power and curriculum are addressed which are integral to the goals of teacher preparation. The premise for Global Perspectives is grounded in ideas presented by Freire and Macedo(1987), who state that, ". . . it is

through multiple discourses that students generate meaning in their everyday social context." Over the semester, each student creates and presents to the class a major project which must be recognizable as a "multicultural" calendar, intended for actual future use in teaching. The calendars are expressions of the situated discourse (Gee, 1996) of individual students. Various experiential strategies are employed to build toward the calendar project. Students respond to each other and to instructors in dialogue journals about their lives, their concepts of teaching, and the course texts. Students participate in and create activities which examine stereotypes and world concerns, or elect to engage in service learning with homeless children and youth through a community organization (Kroloff, 1993; Rafferty, 1998). Global Perspectives also asks students to focus on teaching about world concerns (Arlen, 1975; Gonick & Outwater, 1996; Gore, 1993; Saign, 1994; United Nations, 1989). The shaping of multicultural curriculum as the expression and inclusion of world concerns within all subject matters and the developing awareness of students' own stereotyping in everyday life is a critical project in curriculum making throughout the course.

The course assignments are designed to inform the work which results in each student's calendar and presentation. Meanings are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). That students' social and cultural constructions are also political and call into question taken-for-granted realities (Garfinkel, 1967; Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993; Schutz, 1966) bears on their openness to changing perspectives. These conceptual and value changes are legitimated through talk and interaction as a matter of consciousness (Friere, 1985; Weber, 1949) and interpretation (Palmer, 1969). This affirms both inter- and intra-personal confrontation (Giroux, 1981) and introduction of disequilibrium (Piaget, 1971) as a possibility in the pedagogical relationship.

Therefore, the course provides for attention to meaning and students' expressions and examinations of personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1964). Through explication of their educational and stereotypical presuppositions and biases students are prepared to teach in 21st Century urban elementary and secondary classrooms.

MODES OF INQUIRY

In this action research, the investigators seek to understand and improve practice, through experiential pedagogy, use of the analytic tools of induction, ethnographic recording, and critical discourse. Our work is a longitudinal, incremental, multi-layered approach, one of grounded theory (Hutchinson, 1988), using systematic methods of constant comparative analysis to study the richness and diversity of human experience as it is evidenced in the classroom. The approach adapts qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984), and incorporates participant observation, conversations, interviews, use of holistic rating criteria, and analytic reviews of video and audio tape, as well as reflection upon the characteristics of physical artifacts and documents (Turner, 1974) as data.

This self study of the common course we teach generates relevant, plausible theoretical interpretations of students' understandings of their contextual reality in response to the ambiguously defined calendar project assignment. Conversational and holistic approaches inform our planned interventions to improve the quality of education. Our purposeful selection of course resources, design of course requirements including rules for participation and evaluation in the course, and structuring of in-class activities and interactive discussions are part of the action research design.

The form our action research has taken is the development of language for observation, analysis, and modification of our course practices. Multiple action research cycles, triangulation of data sources, our practitioner knowledge, and collective reflection between ourselves and with students comprises participatory, democratic, and transformative experience that contributes to social science and social change (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Noffke, 1997; Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

As teacher educators, we are leader/participants in action, response, reflection, recognition and questioning, all of which constitutes interpretive work[1] (Garfinkel, 1967). This interpretive work encourages imaginative thought, fosters risk-taking, invites creativity, nourishes mutuality, and cultivates questioning the taken-for-granted ways of viewing the world. We draw upon the multiple cultures the students bring through global perspectives activities, the multicultural calendar project, and by pairing students as journal partners and as "apprentice pairs" for creating global perspectives.

Our interpretive work attempts to frame the process of making oneself aware of the relationship between curricular purposes and choices. The students become teachers and the teacher educators become "student informants" as communicative competence (Habermas, 1976) is achieved between teacher and student and between all participants as students. All participants are actively constructing meaning through acts of interpretation that move toward making the connection between local action and global consciousness within and beyond the classroom.

As teacher/researchers, we have initially focused on interpretive work that captures the

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[1]H. Garfinkel uses the term, "interpretive work," in his explication of ethnomethodology.

multiple representations of participants' interpretations of multicultural curriculum, expressed in the form of a calendar. What is revealed are students' taken-for-granted views of time, culture, knowledge, and values. Thus, our approach extends the work of understanding the artifacts as inter- and intra-personally constructed calendars to the interpretation of artifacts as texts (Ricoeur, 1976). The students' constructive activities and the formative and summative experience of holistic assessment (DeFina, Anstendig, and De Lawter, 1991) provides the impetus and grounding for the multicultural calendar project. It is a form of self-reflective inquiry which cultivates our subject population's understandings of multicultural curriculum as the formation of a global perspective.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBJECT POPULATION:

As teacher educators and curriculum developers, we recognize the rich condition of our circumstances, namely, the widely diverse student body who are changing careers to enter the teaching profession as graduate students on the urban campus of Pace University in lower Manhattan in New York City. Graduate students who take Global Perspectives are this study's particular subjects. These students, male and female, range in age from 20+ to 50+ and are of diverse ethnic backgrounds. All students are asked to participate, but only some students are selected, based on the calendar artifact they created.

The Master of Science in Teaching (MST) program is open to students whose undergraduate backgrounds have been successful, and whose areas of undergraduate study either lend themselves to meeting the New York State teacher certification requirements or who are willing to make up the difference in the subjects in which they do not have enough college credits.

These students have usually considered very carefully where they have been, and what they believe they are giving up and "getting" from their choice to become a teacher. Students who choose to enter the MST program create an international classroom context for the Global Perspectives course. Their generally high level of eagerness and desire to succeed combines with our own enthusiasm for providing them with opportunities to see how they may draw upon their own, and each other's talents, skills, and understandings formed in other settings, to achieve the knowledge required for teaching.

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES CALENDAR ASSIGNMENT

A Curricular Task

The calendar assignment is defined in the course syllabus as a student invented multicultural artifact which can be recognized and used in a K-12 classroom as a "calendar," for constructing multicultural meanings intrapersonally and interpersonally. In the teacher education classroom, it is a curricular "problematic[2]," continually present and a subject of discussion throughout the course sessions. Every student is scheduled to present his/her multicultural calendar project during the final course meetings (four or five weeks of class). Students have maximum time to develop and reflect upon their own and others' calendars with the aid and challenge of holistic criteria and practice in scoring.

The calendar project poses an ambiguous curriculum task which stimulates and challenges the preservice teacher education students to think in new ways that call for personal engagement, imagination and a willingness to persist. Students are concerned enough about their course grade

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[2]This concept is discussed by Giroux (1983, p.72).

to complete the calendar project, even if starting is difficult and multiple false starts are made. For many students, recognition of their achievements by self and from other classmates results in an emerging sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). The students' increased awareness of theoretical constructs about diversity and culturally responsive teaching practices (Hollins, 1995; Leck,1990; Nel, 1995), make the thought of entering their own classrooms conceivable. The Multicultural Calendar project is often highlighted in course evaluations as the students' most significant accomplishment in the teacher education program.

Holistic Assessment

One way the multicultural calendar project calls upon students to acknowledge what each brings to the setting is the use of holistic criteria and scoring. An holistic evaluation rubric and procedure (De Lawter, 1986), developed with students, is used as a scoring device. The mechanism includes student self and peer evaluations as well as professorial criticism. The criteria by which each calendar is evaluated are: Unique/Original, Personal Connectedness, Eye Catching/Surprising, Cross-Cultural, Interactive, Educative/Usefulness, Relatable to subject matter, and Relatable to viewer. This experiential process provides authentic evaluation opportunities to the maker of the calendar as well as to the audience.

In addition, the holistic analytic evaluative rubric raises many issues that prospective teachers need to confront. It is an instrument that provides a hands-on way for students to experience making judgments based on their interpretations of criteria and how language is used to communicate both ideas and values from a point of view. There is discomfort that sometimes attaches to making remarks about another's work, whether it is considered an act of constructive criticism and formative, or summative and defined by an authority. As both an exercise and a

taking of responsibility to tell another person what you think about his/her work, the task of evaluating is one of risk taking. As such, feelings and consequences surround the act. The actions and consequences that are particular to the classroom context need to be explored, as an authentic teaching and learning task. In the making of the multicultural calendar, part of the project is to consider how to address the holistic criteria and to view one's own artifact "objectively," through one's own interpretive powers, but most importantly to come to be able to reflect upon one's own relationship to the work and see the uniqueness of that relationship. Holistic evaluation is an extension of the thrust into "global citizenship," wherein each student is immersed in assessment as an institutional duty, both as a community member-with-a-purpose and facing up to the teacher's educational responsibility.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The Global Perspectives course provides students with opportunities for self-reflection, including examination of their taken-for-granted presuppositions and their stereotypical biases. In order to prepare teachers for urban and other diverse elementary and secondary classrooms such written and shared personal observations of self are crucial. Over the past four years, as instructor-investigators, we have been exploring our own taken-for-granted meanings and negotiating the language we use to make sense of the course. Our emerging and developing research questions not only explore the students' work but also inquire into the processes of our own collaboration. We are in the process of formulating research questions. Below are our initial questions, moving from a focus on students' work, to teacher educators' reflexive praxis:

- What student responses and accomplishments do the multicultural calendar projects

encourage, support and inspire?

- What is the meaningfulness of the multicultural calendar project to the students?
- In envisioning their own classrooms, how do teacher education students display their expectations of pupils, and their schemas about schools?
- How do the multicultural calendar artifacts show the integration of pedagogical understanding and an awareness of diversity and world concerns?
- What is the impact of the multicultural calendar project on students' views of themselves as prospective teachers?
- How do the qualities and values of the multicultural calendar project relate to teacher preparation for urban education?
- What can educators learn from the multicultural calendar project?
- What are the qualities of the collaboration between the teacher educator/researchers?
- How do the researchers' individual working styles, communication styles, and views of substantive issues influence the research process?

We expect that our analysis will result in further questions and thematic constructs.

DATA SOURCES:

We experience, "first hand," our primary resource for data, the students themselves, and what each brings to the situation. When students talk about their own cultural backgrounds, and how their backgrounds influence the calendar's creation, these are included as data. Tangible data sources for this study include original calendar artifacts and their accompanying materials, the videotape of students' presentations in class, instructors' and student audiences' interactive

observations and rubric for evaluations which detail their reactions to the calendar, and audiotape of later discussions between the instructors as they interpret the calendars. Other data sources include the course syllabi and materials, selected student writings, and records of evaluations made by course participants. This mode of inquiry expresses a commitment to systematically extend, clarify, and refine a methodology that can examine the meanings of the multicultural calendars as artifacts and texts.

EMERGENT THEMES

In viewing the multicultural calendars as artifacts and texts, and reviewing the statements made by the calendar's creators on videotape, the two instructors explore the focal and tacit dimensions of students' expressed personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1964, 1967). We negotiate meanings and generate themes that become evident across multiple calendar projects, and in our collaboration. Critical evidence of students' meanings are found in students' use of language to name concepts with their calendars. This naming points to a continuum in which language is assumed to carry knowledge. When students use language or symbols as a label to carry meaning, they do not provide a referential context, but assume the viewer/knower brings a tacit understanding. This "labeling as naming," is contrasted with the work of other students who accomplish naming by constructing meaning at multiple levels of graphical representations of time and culture. In defining "labeling as naming," we are coming to a specificity in our use of the word "naming," to acknowledge a reality that takes place in classrooms. As researchers, we are identifying student activity and formulating a language to express our meanings, mindful of our use of "naming" as differentiated from that used by other researchers (Fine, 1987).

The multicultural calendar project thus informs about the critical perspective brought by the student, and whether time and culture are taken-for-granted or more critically perceived. There is evidence of additional emerging themes, such as the importance of originality in artifact creation, participatory holistic assessment as a vehicle for reorientation of perspective, peer evaluation as contributing to education students' awareness of culture, and a sense of vitality in the integration of world concerns. Finally, the theme of teacher educators' reflections and involvement in collaborative action research to improve practice in experiential education has become evident through the process. These themes become the basis for seeking further evidence in the calendars themselves of the students' approaches to critical thinking, critical theory and their personal constructions of meaning.

The methodologies used in teaching Global Perspectives that ground our themes have been developed over time, some thirteen years by one instructor, and adapted by the second instructor over the past five years. As teacher researchers, our differing orientations, though we are both white women, are another dimension to the diversity and layering of our methodology. This dimension will be addressed in the future. For the present, our mutual concern is to take into account not only what we think students need to know, but also what will be most effective in the short amount of time that we have to prepare the students to teach in today's classrooms.

In our systematic examination of the calendars we have found there are a number of themes present in many, if not all, the calendars. We have categorized these into two separate sets: First, the student's interpretation of multicultural curriculum through the making and assessing of the artifacts, and second, our collaboration as teacher educators and action researchers.

Generative Themes: Students' multicultural calendar artifacts

- Labeling as naming - A continuum of multiple levels of graphic/ symbolic representations of multicultural curriculum;
- Time and culture - taken for granted/ critically understood;
- Historical perspective- making linkages/ consciousness of underpinnings;
- A continuum of superficiality/ depth - purposefulness of the calendar;
- Consciousness of taken-for-granted presuppositions about teaching, curriculum, and the stereotypical characteristics of cultures - interpersonal and textual;
- Physical artifact: aesthetic value/ expressiveness/ educative value/ usefulness;
- Students' accomplishments: artifact creation, originality and assessment;
- Envisioning classrooms: working with the holistic criteria;
- Qualities of "problematic" assignments: tensions of expectations in an academic setting;

Generative Themes: Teacher educator's collaboration

- Respect for "the other;"
    - questioning the language and paradigms we bring to understanding each other's interpretations as we conduct this research: connecting our collaboration with the students' making of community;
    - focus on our process of research collaboration: what we actually do and experience as we negotiate the tension between categorization and deconstruction.
- Teacher educators' reflections on teaching;

- our development of methods of experiential education;
- our individual and collaborative curricular decisions and assessment practices;

DISCUSSION

The multicultural calendar serves the students as a "motivator for conceptual change" (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993). The task requires students to think about cultural and personal markings of time, and how they impact on teaching within the students' desired certification level and discipline. Given teacher education's programmatic priority to prepare teachers to work with culturally diverse students (Evans et al, 1997; Hollins, 1995), the project calls into question these future teachers' goals, their understandings of culture and diversity, and their conceptions of teaching, especially in urban classrooms (Ayers & Ford, 1996; Haberman, 1991; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Silverman et al, 1993; Trent, 1990, Meier, 1995). The qualities of the artifacts, and the process of evaluation and interpretation indicate that the calendar is an effective tool for conceptual change.

Calendar projects provide a process through which education students are the informants of teacher educators. The multicultural calendars indicate how graduate career-changing teacher education students envision their future work in curriculum making, teaching and holistic evaluation. Access to multicultural calendar artifacts makes possible an exchange of views between colleagues interested in the development of students' global perspectives, and their consciousness of issues of social justice and educational change.

This research represents a work in progress, in which conclusions are tentative and data is continuously being gathered and reinterpreted. Initial findings have led to modifications in the

course, based in part on growing knowledge of the impact of the multicultural calendar project. We find that creating a multicultural calendar also enables teacher education students to get in touch with their ideas and beliefs about how to approach diverse students and curriculum and become confident that they can contribute to a school community.

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